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ABSTRACT

In September 1991, the superintendent of a midwestern suburban school district authorized a survey to investigate the factors influencing parental school or program choice. Of 900 surveys sent to equal proportions of parents of high school students, fourth- and fifth-graders, and kindergarten-aged students, 250 usable replies were returned. The survey was divided into an opinion survey and a study of parent decisions in selecting schools for their children. The majority of respondents were aware of a choice policy, but 46 percent claimed they were unaware. When asked if parents should have a choice of any school, 87 percent answered affirmatively; when asked if students from other districts should attend schools in this district, only 37 percent said "yes." When asked if they would choose another district school, only 22 percent responded affirmatively. When considering the relative importance of 12 factors used in the 1990 "Phi Delta Kappan" pool, parents chose student body grades or test scores, student body racial or ethnic composition, and proximity to home as the three most important selection factors. These results contradict the "Kappan" survey's findings concerning the primary importance of teaching staff quality, maintenance of student discipline, and curriculum. Midwestern parents' survey responses imply a difference between parents' philosophical feelings and the choices they actually make. While they want choice, they were unlikely to use it. Reasons and implications are discussed. (MLH)

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An Investigation of Factors that Influence Parents' Choice of Schools for Their Children in a Midwestern Suburban School District

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An Investigation of Factors that Influence Parents' Choice of Schools for Their Children in a Midwestern Suburban School District

Executive Summary

On October 25, 1991 two members of the Appalachian State University research team met with school district management to discuss the possibility of a study of parental involvement in the choice of schools or programs. After receiving permission from the Superintendent, the research team began preparing the survey forms to be used in the study. At the request of Superintendent, a section of the study was designed to gather the opinions of the respondents on questions supplied by the school district.

The survey was mailed to nine hundred parents selected in early February, 1992. One third of the group were parents of high school students, one third were parents of fourth and fifth grade students, and the other third were parents of kindergarten-aged students. As of April 2, 1992, 250 usable replies had been received. While the response was somewhat low, it is not inconsistent with other surveys of parents conducted in school districts.

The survey was divided into two parts; an opinion survey and a study of parent decisions in selecting schools for their children. The opinion survey revealed that a majority of the parents were aware of the Board of Education's process of development of a choice policy. However, a significant number (46%) answered that they were not aware. When asked if the parents should have a choice of any school, 87% answered "yes." This duplicates what most national studies have found. The next question dealt with students from other school districts attending schools in this district. Only 37% of the parents answered yes and some of these yes responses were conditioned on special needs.

The parents were asked if they would choose another school within the school district. Only 22% responded with a "yes." This approximates the 28% "yes" response to a similar question on a national survey recently reported by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The final question dealt with choosing to enroll students in schools outside the district. Only 17% responded favorably to this question and some of these responses were

qualified with respect to programs or services not offered in district schools.

The second part of this study dealt with the relative importance of the factors parents might consider in selecting a school for their son of daughter. The factors used in this study were those used in the 1990 Phi Delta Kappan Gallup poll. The poll asked respondents to indicate the degree to which they considered each factor important on a four-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very important." The following is a listing of these twelve factors in the order of importance based upon the responses to the survey:

1. Quality of the teaching staff.
2. Maintenance of student discipline.
3. Curriculum (i.e., the courses offered).
4. Size of classes.
5. Grades of test scores of the student body.
6. Success record of graduates in high school, in College, or on the job.
7. Size of the school.
8. Proximity to home.
9. Extracurricular activities such as band/orchestra, theater, clubs.
10. Social and economic background of the student body.
11. Racial or ethnic composition of the student body.
12. Athletic program.

In this study, each of the factors listed in the Phi Delta Kappa Gallup poll survey was compared to each of the other factors. The parent was asked to pick the most important in each of the pairings. This procedure produced a rank order of importance of the twelve factors considered. The order resulting from the responses of the district parents is:

1. Grades or test scores of student body.
2. Racial or ethnic composition of the student body.
3. Proximity to home.

4. Extracurricular activities such as band/orchestra, theater, clubs.
5. Athletic program.
6. Curriculum (i.e., the courses offered).
7. Social and economic background of the student body.
8. Size of the school.
9. Size of classes.
10. Success record of graduates in high school, incollege, or on the job.
11. Maintenance of student discipline.
12. Quality of teaching staff.

The two top items on the Phi Delta Kappan Gallup poll survey -- "quality of teaching staff" and "maintenance of student discipline" were the two least important based on the results of this parent survey. It should be noted, however, that in our survey there was only marginal discernible differences in the magnitude of importance of the first seven items. It should also be noted that only item 6, "curriculum" relates to educational programs in the first seven ranked factors.

The demographic data analysis reveals that among males and females, both were in agreement as to the top three factors in choosing schools for their children. Women apparently place more emphasis on "extracurricular activities", "curriculum", and "athletics" than did the men in the sample of respondents. On the other hand, the male respondents assigned the "quality of the teaching staff" a greater degree of importance that did the female respondents. Only minor differences in the rankings were given by respondents with college experience and those with no college experience were observed.

Rank-ordering of the importance of the twelve choice factors by parents of children in kindergarten depended upon the program in which their children were enrolled. Parents of children in the all day program ranked "Grades and test scores" most important. Parents with students in the alternating days program ranked the school's "success record" as most important.

Parents of fourth and fifth grade students were very similar in their

responses, although the parents of the regularly assigned pupils ranked "athletic program" relatively high and the "quality of the teaching staff" relatively unimportant. Parents with pupils in the magnet program reversed this order.

The rankings of parents of high school students from choice and regular attendance areas were very similar. There appear to be no major differences.

Conclusion

To the extent to which the sample is representative of the school district as a whole, the data indicated that the opinion of the parents relative to choice is positive in favor of the school district. The pattern of responses to the opinion survey approximates recent national studies and suggests a relatively low response to opportunities to transfer students from one school to another within the district. There appears to be even less likelihood that parents will exercise a right to transfer students to schools in other districts.

If parents do elect to transfer their son or daughter to another school, the data suggests that such a decision would be based upon the reputation of the school chosen, the make-up of the student body and the proximity to home. The data would seem to indicate that various groupings of parents consider somewhat different factors when considering choice decisions. Each of these groupings will have different informational needs as they review choice options.

An Investigation of Factors That Influence Parents' Choice of Schools for Their Children in a Midwestern Suburban School District

Last Spring, 1991, with the permission of the superintendent, we administered a survey to a sample of district parents in which we sought to determine factors considered important by parents of school children in decisions regarding choice of schools for their children. This is a report of the findings from that survey.

Throughout the country, school-choice programs are being adopted at a rapid rate. Even so, little empirical evidence of the factors that influence parents' choice of school has been reported. A survey of parents in Minnesota indicated that curriculum and location were prime considerations (Bamber, Berla, Henderson, & Rioux, 1990). Elam (1990), reporting the results of a recent Gallup Poll commissioned by the Phi Delta Kappan, included "quality of the teaching staff" and "maintenance of student discipline" among factors parents considered most important, and "racial or ethnic composition of the student body" and "athletic programs" as least important.

Table 1

Factors Involved in School Choice

1.	Maintenance of student discipline.
2.	Quality of the teaching staff.
3.	Curriculum (courses offered).
4.	Size of classes.
5.	Grades or test scores of the student body.
6.	Success record of graduates in high school, in college or on the job.
7.	Size of school.
8.	Proximity to home.
9.	Extracurricular activities (band/orchestra, theater, clubs).
10.	Social and economic background of the student body.
11.	Racial or ethnic composition of the student body.
12.	Athletic program.

The factors of school choice used in the Kappan study (Table 1) provided

a basis for the study reported here.

Procedures

Our survey of factors that influence parental decisions concerning school choice used the same 12 factors as those included in the Kappan study. However, whereas the Kappan survey asked parents to indicate the degree to which they considered each important on a four-point scale (from "not important at all" to "very important"), our instructions to parents forced them, in effect, to order the factors from most important to least important. In addition, we included five questions, suggested by the superintendent, that were designed to evaluate parents' opinions concerning various school-choice options.

Method. In organizing the survey, we placed the superintendent's five questions first, then followed these with a preference schedule designed to assess the importance of each of the 12 school-choice factors. In constructing this second section to the survey we used a technique known as the method of pair-comparisons in which all 66 possible parings of the 12 factors were presented along with the instructions to "choose between [each of the] two reasons [in each paring] for sending your child to a particular school." The method of pair-comparisons is generally considered superior to other methods of obtaining rank orderings of judgmental factors. Aside from being quick and easy to administer, the method results in the factors being ordered along a scale that has desirable psychometric properties (interval and unidimensional). Thus, not only is it possible to rank-order the factors in terms of importance; but, through appropriate treatment of the response data, it is possible to tell how much more important higher ranked factors are compared to lower ranked factors (Edwards, 1957; Guilford, 1936, 1954). A cautionary note is in order, however. Consistent rankings are generally obtained only when the number of respondents is large--in excess of a hundred, with two hundred or more being preferable. When the number of respondents is small the derived ranks can be unreliable. It will be important to keep this in mind later when interpreting the results of this study.

In analyzing the data, we computed frequencies and percentages of responses for each of the five questions concerning the various choice options, and we used a computer program supplied to us by Bradford & Schriesheim (1990) of the University of Miami. The program yielded rankings for each of the parental choice factors, along with standard deviations and scaled distances of importance between adjacent factors.

Sample. The school district offers five types of parental choice configurations.

1. Kindergarten: Parents can choose among an all-day program (Longfellow, Royalview, Thomas Jefferson); a half-day, every-day program (Thomas Edison); or a half-day, alternate days program (all other schools).

2. Zenith program: This program, available only to students who qualify, operates both as a one-day-a-week pull-out program and as a self-contained program at George Washington elementary school, and as an honors and advanced placement program in the district's secondary schools.

3. Magnet programs: These programs, for average or better-than-average students Grades 4 and 5, are offered in each of the district's middle schools.

4. High school choice area: Students living in two geographical areas of the district have the choice of attending either of two high schools.

5. Special needs programs: When qualified special needs exist, parents may request that their child(ren) attend any school in the district.

Our sample included parents of students from three of these configurations: the kindergarten programs, the Grades 4 and 5 magnet programs, and the High school choice area. In addition, we included parents of students of fourth and fifth graders in regular programs, and high school students from outside the choice area.

The numbers of parents sampled from each program, along with the number and percentages of respondents, are given in Table 2. As can be seen in the table, we included all parents of students in the all-day-every-day kindergarten program, and the Grades 4 and 5 magnet programs. The actual numbers of parents who responded to our survey was somewhat low, but not inconsistent with other surveys of parents conducted in school districts. In all, 250 surveys were returned by April 2, 1992. We were pleased to see that

Table 2

Number of Parents Sampled and
Numbers and Percentages of Respondents

	Sample	Response	Percent
Kindergarten			
All day, every day	40*	40	100.00
Half day, every day	110	20	18.18
Half day, alternate days	150	52	34.67
Grade 4			
Regular Program	80	24	30.00
Magnet Program	63*	20	31.75
Grade 5			
Regular Program	85	21	24.71
Magnet Program	72*	20	27.78
High School			
Choice Area	150	32	21.33
Non-choice Area	150	38	25.33

*We used all available families in the All day, every day kindergarten program, and the Grades 4 and 5 magnet programs.

all the parents in the all-day-every-day kindergarten program chose to respond to our survey. On the other hand, the 18.2 percent response rate among parents of children in the half-day-every-day programs was disproportionately low.

The respondents to the survey were distributed across various demographic characteristics as shown in Table 3. By and large, the typical respondent could be described as a married white female under the age of 40 with a high school diploma and, often, some college education. Most families had both parents living at home, had three children or less, and had a combined income between $30,000 and $60,000.

Results

Options concerning school choice. The five questions along with the numbers and percentages of responses of the 250 parents who returned a survey are given in Table 4.

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Respondents

	N	%		N	%
Gender			Age		
Male	53	23.14	21-30	25	10.82
Female	176	76.86	31-40	138	59.74
TOTAL	229	100.00	41-50	63	27.27
			51-60	5	2.16
			TOTAL	231	100.99
Race			Marital Status		
White	223	97.38	Single	4	1.74
Black	2	.87	Divorced	30	13.74
Hispanic	2	.87	Widowed	2	.87
Asian	2	.87	Married	194	84.35
Other	0	.00	TOTAL	230	100.00
TOTAL	229	100.00			
Education			Income		
Did not Grad	10	4.31	< $10,000	18	8.11
H.S. Grad	73	31.47	$10K - $20K	20	9.01
Some College	75	32.33	$20K - $30K	32	14.41
College Grad	40	17.25	$30K - $40K	48	21.62
Graduate Col	15	6.47	$40K - $50K	40	18.02
Masters Deg.	16	6.90	$50K - $60K	13	16.67
Doctors Deg.	3	1.29	> $60,000	27	12.16
TOTAL	232	100.00	TOTAL	222	100.00
Head of Household			Time in District		
Both parents	184	80.00	1-5 years	63	27.27
Single	35	15.22	6-10 years	51	22.08
Legal Gard.	3	1.30	11-15 years	42	18.18
Other	8	3.48	Over 15 yrs.	75	32.47
TOTAL	230	100.00	TOTAL	231	100.00
Employment			Number of Children		
Unemployed	41	18.81	One	36	15.52
Semi-skilled	16	7,34	Two	104	44.83
Service	17	7.80	Three	68	29.31
Skilled	45	20.64	Four	22	9.48
Professional	99	45.41	Five	2	.86
TOTAL	218	100.00	TOTAL	232	100.00

The response to question 1, concerning the awareness that the district's School Board was in the process of developing policies on student transfers within and outside the school district yielded a favorable response from 54% of the respondents. However, since 50% of the respondents surveyed were selected from those families who had exercised some choice option within the district, the size of the negative response is significant. The negative response was lowest among parents of high school students.

The second question was one that is typically asked in choice opinion surveys, "Do you feel students should be allowed to attend any school within their home district?" The response was overwhelmingly positive with 87% of the respondents answering in the affirmative. This response is very similar to those obtained in other opinion surveys.

The response pattern was very different when the parents were asked "Do you feel students who live in neighboring districts should be allowed to attend district schools?" Only 37% of the parents replied with a "yes" and some of these qualified their "yes" response to include only students who paid tuition. Others who answered in the affirmative indicated that they would limit such attendance to students with special needs.

The next question was, "If allowed, would you enroll your child in a school, within the [district], other than the school your child attends?" Less than one-fourth (22%) of the parents responded with "yes." This is similar to the 28% affirmative response to a like question on the recently reported national study done by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Olson, 1992). The 22% "yes" response is in sharp contrast to the 87% who indicated that students should be allowed to attend any school within their home district. In the comments section of this question, one respondent noted "probably not, but would like having the option." Having the option and using the option appear to be two separate things.

Other respondent comments expressed support for neighborhood schools. There were comments to the effect that the school the child would attend had been a major factor in the selection of the home. This may be the ultimate committment to choice. Other comments raised questions about transportation

Table 4

[District] City Schools
Parent Choice Survey

1. Are you aware that the [District] School Board is in the process of developing policy and procedures regarding student transfers within the district and student transfers between neighboring districts?

	Yes	%	No	%
Kindergarten parents	50	50%	50	50%
4/5th parents	41	48%	44	52%
High school parents	43	66%	22	34%
TOTAL	134	54%	116	46%

2. Do you feel students should be allowed to attend any school within their home district?

	Yes	%	No	%	No Ans
Kindergarten parents	89	89%	10	10%	1
4/5th parents	75	88%	10	12%	
High school parents	54	83%	11	17%	
TOTAL	218	87%	31	12%	1

3. Do you feel students who live in neighboring districts should be allowed to attend [District] Schools?

	Yes	5	No	%	No Ans	Unde-cided
Kindergarten parents	33	33%	66	66%	1	
4/5th parents	33	39%	49	58%	1	2
High school parents	27	42%	37	57%	1	
TOTAL	93	37%	152	61%	3	2

4. If allowed, would you enroll your child in a [District] School other than the school your child attends?

	Yes	%	No	%	No Ans	Unde-cided
Kindergarten parents	20	20%	75	75%	2	3
4/5th parents	15	18%	66	78%	1	2
High school parents	20	31%	42	65%	3	
TOTAL	55	22%	183	73%	6	5

5. If allowed, would you enroll your child in a school outside the [District]?

	Yes	%	No	%	No Ans	Unde-cided
Kindergarten parents	18	18%	81	81%	1	
4/5th parents	9	11%	74	87%		1
High school parents	16	25%	47	72%	2	
TOTAL	43	17%	202	81%	3	1

Note: Results based on 250 returns as of April 1, 1992

and the cost of transportation. Still other comments seemed to indicate that parental convenience would influence decisions about choice of schools. This question evoked more comments than any other question.

The final question, "If allowed, would you enroll your child in a school outside the school [District]?" evoked the least favorable response. Only 17% of the parents answered "yes" to this question. The response was least favorable (only 11% affirmative) among parents of fourth and fifth grade students. Some of those answering "yes" qualified their answer in terms of special programs and services not offered in the school district.

An overall review of the responses revealed a strong loyalty to the school the child attends, and to the school district. This attitude appears to influence the parents' decisions regarding choice of school. While high school parents were somewhat more likely to consider enrolling their child in some other school in the district or in another district, a very significant majority would not.

Factors influencing choice of school. The rank-orderings of the twelve factors of parental choice in schooling obtained from the total group of respondents, and for various subgrouings, are given in Tables 5, 6, and 7. In each of the tables, the ordering of the factors is according to the preferences given by the total group of respondents. In Table 5, for instance, "grades or test scores of the student body" was considered most important by the total group when considering choice of school. Hence, this factor was assigned a rank of 1; the next most important factor for this group was "racial or ethnic composition of the student body." This factor was assigned a rank of 2; and so on. Table 5 also gives the rankings of the factors from the Kappan article for comparison.

Preferences of the total group. Whereas "quality of the teaching staff" and " maintenance of student discipline" were given highest priority in the Kappan study, these two factors were judged least important in choosing a school by the district parents. On the other hand, "racial or ethnic composition of the student body," ranked nearly at the bottom in terms of importance in the Kappan study was ranked nearly at the top by district parents. "Extracurricular activities" and the "athletic program" were both rated more important by the district group than by the parents responding to

the Kappan study. On the other hand, "size of classes" and the "success record of graduates in high school, college, or on the job" was considered less important by parents of district students.

The method we used to analyze the responses to our survey allowed us to evaluate the magnitudes of the differences in importance assigned to adjacent factors in terms of standard deviation units[1]. When the magnitudes were taken into account, the degree of difference in importance given to adjacent factors tended to be quite small, even though the highest-ranked factors could be considered significantly more important than the lowest-ranked factors. In other words, while "grades or test scores of the student body" and "racial or ethnic composition of the student body" could be clearly differentiated as being rated more important than "maintenance of student discipline" and "quality of teaching staff" as factors in choosing schools, there was little differentiation between "grades or test scores" and "racial or ethnic composition" or between "student discipline" and "quality of teaching staff." In fact, in terms of magnitudes of importance the difference in importance between "grades or test scores" (ranked first in importance) and "social and economic background" (ranked seventh in importance) was only marginally discernable. Thus, while it is always possible to rank-order a set of preferences, the preferences themselves might be so similar as to make the differences in the preferences more apparent than real.

Preferences by Gender and Education. While there were enough female respondents (176) to virtually insure consistent rankings of the choice factors, the relatively small number of male respondents (53) was cause enough to urge caution in interpreting their results. Likewise, the large number of respondents with at least some college education (149) was large enough to yield consistent rankings, but the smaller number of respondents with no college experience (83) allows for inconsistency in their rankings of the

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[1]The technical details for computing standardized scale scores for preferences obtained by the method of pair comparisons will not be given here. The interested reader is referred to the treatments given in Edwards (1957) and Guilford (1954).

factors of school choice. Nevertheless, the results for all four groups are given in Table 5. Again, the reader is urged to exercise prudence in

Table 5

Rank-Orderings of Factors Affecting School Choice for the Total Group of Respondents and by Gender and Education

Factor	Total Sample	Gender		Education		Kappan
		Males	Females	College	No Col.	
Test Scores	1	1	1	1	1	5
Racial Comp.	2	2	2	2	4	11
Close to Home	3	3	3	3	6	8
Curriculum	4	8	5	4	2	3
Ext'curricular	5	7	4	5	3	9
Athletics	6	12	6	6	5	12
Student SES	7	11	7	7	8	10
School Size	8	10	8	8	9	7
Class Size	9	5	9	9	10	4
Success Rec'rd	10	6	10	10	7	6
Discipline	11	9	11	11	11	2
Teaching Staff	12	4	12	12	12	1

interpreting the results for males and respondents with no college experience.

Among males and females, both were in agreement as to the top three factors in choosing schools for their children. Woman apparently placed a greater emphasis on "extracurricular activities," "curriculum," and "athletics" than did the men in the sample of respondents. On the other hand, the male respondents assigned the "quality of the teaching staff" and the "success record" a greater degree of importance than did the female respondents.

Only minor differences in the rankings given by respondents with college experience and those with no college experience were observed. As in the cases of the total group of respondents, when the magnitudes of scaled values of the differences in importance was taken into account the differences in rank orderings were not interpretable. In other words, even though "racial and ethnic composition" was ranked greater in importance than "curriculum," in

terms of their actual scaled values they could be considered equally important. Similarly, while "curriculum" was ranked higher than "racial and ethnic composition" among the non-college educated group, in terms of scaled values of the preferences the two factors were equally important. Thus, even though the rankings of these two factors are reversed in the two groups of respondents, the fact that the two factors are equally important in both groups renders moot any interpretation of the differences in rank orderings.

Preferences by type of program. Rank-orderings of the importance of the twelve choice factors by parents of children in kindergarten and in Grades 4 and 5 are given in Table 6; and by parents of high school students, in Table 7. What factors parents considered important in choosing a school for their child differed depending upon the kindergarten program in which their children were enrolled.

Table 6

Rank-Orderings of Factors Affecting School Choice by Type of Program

Factor	Kindergarten Program			Grades 4 & 5	
	All Day	1/2 Every	1/2 Alt	Regular	Magnet
Test Scores	7	2	1	1	1
Racial Comp.	9	4	3	2	2
Close to Home	6	5	2	3	3
Ext'curricular	10	8	4	5	4
Athletics	8	3	10	12	5
Curriculum	4	6	5	6	6
Student SES	3	7	6	11	7
School Size	5	9	8	8.5	11
Class Size	2	10	9	9	8
Success Rec'rd	1	1	7	8.5	9
Discipline	12	11	11	10	12
Teaching Staff	11	12	12	4	10

Whereas parents of children in the all day program ranked "grades or test scores" most important, parents of children in half-day-alternating-day programs considered this factor relatively unimportant. On the other hand,

while parents of children in the all day-program (and the half-day-every-day program) assigned little importance to a school's "success record," parents in the alternating days program ranked this factor most important. Other differences in rank-orderings existed but, again for reasons given previously, may not be important.

The only interpretable differences between the importance of factors as seen by parents of fourth- and fifth graders in regular programs and those in the magnet programs were that the regular group ranked "athletic programs" relatively high in importance and the "quality of teaching staff," relatively unimportant, while for the magnet group the reverse was true.

Table 7

Rank-Orderings of Factors Affecting
Choice of School by High School Choice Area

Factor	High School Program	
	Choice Area	Non Choice Area
Test Scores	2	3
Racial Comp.	3	1
Close to Home	6	4
Ext'Curricular	1	7
Athletics	5	6
Curriculum	4	2
Student SES	7	5
School Size	9	8
Class Size	11	9
Success Rec'rd	10	10
Discipline	8	11
Teaching Staff	12	12

Among parents of high school students, differences in the rank-orderings of the choice factors were observed for the two groups (choice area and non-choice area). Again, however, the differences in the magnitudes of the scaled values of importance were not great enough for the differences in rankings to be meaningful. In both groups "grades or test scores," "racial or ethnic composition," "curriculum," and "extracurricular activities" tended to be

important factors in choosing schools. A school's "success record" and the "quality of teaching staff" were judged to be of relatively little importance.

Conclusions

This study was undertaken in an effort to obtain information that would inform policy regarding school choice in the district. The responses to the five questions concerning various choice options implied a difference between parents' philosophical feelings and the choices they actually make. While parents appeared to want choice in selecting schools for their children, they were unlikely to use it.

Without further information regarding cultural, social, economic, and political structures of the various schools involved in the study, however, it is difficult for us to draw meaningful policy-related conclusions. These are the prerogatives of the district's administration and Board of Education. In drawing conclusions from the findings presented earlier, readers should be careful not to misinterpret the results.

For instance, the fact that parents assigned "student discipline" and the "quality of the teaching staff" little importance in their decisions regarding their choice of school for their children might reflect a general, districtwide feeling of satisfaction with respect to the district's teaching staff and the manner in which they handle student discipline. If, on average, all the teachers in the district are regarded highly, then "quality of teaching staff" would not be expected to play much of a role in parents choice of schools. On the other hand, "grades and test scores" are often important to upwardly-motivated, typically middle-class parents. From the demographic characteristics given in Table 2 it would appear that the respondents to the survey fit this description rather well. Hence it should probably not have been unexpected that these individuals would consider "grades and test scores" important.

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